

What are the Benefits of the Water Stewardship Program and For Whom?

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) has drafted three sets of benefits for the proposed water stewardship program. There is one set for each major stakeholder group: businesses & water service providers, civil society organizations, and public sector agencies (which includes government).

Businesses and water service providers:

- Internally, the water stewardship program will help these stakeholders, who will be applying the standard(s) on the ground, with an improved understanding of water risks & opportunities:
 - Identify, evaluate, manage and reduce their physical water-related business risks and costs by improving operational efficiency and cumulative impacts, including their supply chains. For water service providers, in particular, the water stewardship program will minimize the risks and costs associated with providing services (e.g. water) within a community.
 - Drive positive response to emerging water issues throughout the company, spur innovation in products and services that can help solve water challenges by engaging decision-makers from senior management to plant operators.
- Externally, the water stewardship program will reduce risk, and differentiate businesses & water service providers as "responsible water users/managers." In turn, benefits will help to:
 - Raise the bar with regard to water use and provide a peer group of best practices, accepted targets, benchmarking, and reporting.
 - Legitimately demonstrate to their customers, ratepayers and constituents that they are acting in as open and responsible a manner as is possible in regard to water resources.
 - Provide brand value and peer recognition, which could earn acclaim within emerging sustainable services movements, such as the "Cities of the Future" program, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability, or the International Water Association.
 - Drive employee attraction and retention.
 - Create and maintain positive community relations (around the social license to operate) via transparency and disclosure, while creating or preserving political good will that to help secure access to water resources in a world where water issues are quickly rising up agendas.
 - Enable priority access to socially and environmentally responsible markets, including suppliers who require responsible sourcing policies. Similarly, anticipating the market can also be a strategy to attract socially responsible customers and improve customer loyalty.
 - Allow for strategic alliances with like-minded stakeholders.
 - Access financing (e.g. improved rates and qualifying requirements).

Civil society organizations:

The water stewardship program provides various benefits including being:

- A catalyst for moving primary water users towards greater awareness, responsibility and action on water management issues, including cumulative impacts at the watershed level. Furthermore, such an approach also ensures that practices are accountable and transparent.
- A crucial step in being able to baseline, measure and compare the impacts of water users.
- An efficient and effective means of harnessing market forces that bolster regulatory efforts to achieve specific social and environmental goals.
- A properly branded and effective water stewardship program can be leveraged by the significant media attention civil society organizations can often bring to bear on an issue.

- An equal forum for decision-making in which resources, such as money and size, are minimized as a constraint for participation, thereby ensuring equal power and say to all.

Public sector agencies: The WSP provides various benefits including being:

- Complement and provide significant support for the achievement of water-related policy objectives, and compliance with legal and regulatory regimes.
- Drive improved public perception of progressive collaborative action between public service agencies, businesses & water service providers.
- Reduce the costs of addressing potentially competing interests and aligning stakeholders around consensus-driven watershed-level goals.

Overall, the aim of the AWS is to create an international water stewardship program that provides wins for all stakeholders by achieving important social, economic and environmental goals. However, this aim will only be possible if we work together and in an open manner to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Through the Water Roundtable, we can begin the process of helping to solve each others' problems, as this will be the means for achieving everyone's mutual desires. The value propositions are not intended to be comprehensive. They do, however, illustrate the range of benefits a water stewardship program could provide to a broad range of participants.

Getting Involved in Water Stewardship Standard(s) Development through the Water Roundtable Process and the Regional Initiatives

Having worked through the long term benefits of a water stewardship program, what is the value of getting involved early and participating in the development of the water stewardship standard(s) via the Water Roundtable and the Regional Initiatives? Here are some key reasons for getting involved:

1. **Be a leader:** Make legitimate claims to having helped establish the standard(s). Being a proactive organization can be valuable to employees, customers, donors and others who are looking for a demonstration of tangible and responsible action.
2. **Get a head start on managing your water risks:** Proactive early engagement on standards development will demonstrate commitment and action to stakeholders and minimize the risk of conflict. As attention to water from the media, society, NGOs, investors and insurers grows, early action on water disclosure, transparency, measurement and response will be critical. Standards development and piloting can be a way of managing this risk
3. **Improve your understanding of water opportunities:** Understanding the opportunities that improved water stewardship offers before the standard(s) are fully established will enable organizations to have a first-mover advantage. The Roundtable will provide opportunities to learn and share information about the current, cutting-edge issues surrounding water as a resource. Others can use the insight provided through engagement in the roundtable process to improve strategic planning and budgeting within their business.
4. **Improve relationships with other stakeholders:** All stakeholders can take advantage of strengthening relationships with the broad and diverse group of stakeholders participating in the roundtable. Such relationships can be strategic and important for meeting organizational goals, and can also provide insight into how future conflicts and risk can be minimized.

For more information on how you can get involved and gain these values, please see the AWS document entitled "How to Get Involved."